Signet

SPRING 1971

VOLUME XIV, NO. 2

Signet is published during the academic calendar by the Dowd Press, Inc., Charlotte, North Carolina. It is financed by the Student Government Association of Queens College, and a grant from The North Carolina Arts Council, Raleigh, North Carolina. Address all correspondence to *Signet*, Queens College, Charlotte, North Carolina 28207.

Signet SPRING 1971

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Πowson

GAYLE ADCOCK

HOUSE OF PRAYER

Bishop McDaniel always got up by 5:30 on Sundays. As she eased her puffy feet out of bed onto the board floor, she glanced through the print feed-sack drapes at the window to see if her son's '57 Chevrolet was in the yard. As soon as she was satisfied that he had gotten home safely sometime during the night, she tightened her mouth and shook her head slowly from side to side, rattling the brown paper-bag ties in her hair. By her bed a snapshot of a 12 year old boy hanging onto a mule was encased in a gold frame on a worn but starched doily. Resting her eyes on it for a few minutes, she continued shaking her head.

"Lawd, Willy Buck, You worries yo' Mama crazy."

Turning away from the picture, she began her routine by turning up the quilts on the tired iron bed. She smoothed the fresh sheets and carefully placed the pillow at the head of the bed, not covered by a spread. Then turning quickly to the closet, she dropped the flannel gown around her feet, before dressing for services. Feeling the coldness of the floor on her feet, she shifted from one foot to the other for a few minutes until she could get the bloomer-style pants up to her waist to be free to step over onto the nightgown. That was the hardest part for her, because her weight and age prevented her from bending easily. She carried her duty-weight hose to the bed to sit down and pull them on easier, tourniqueting each one just above the knee. From where she sat, she could reach the shoe bag hanging on the back of the closet door and pull out her Sunday shoes. She laced the black comforts up quickly, grunting as she pulled each foot up to rest on the opposite knee in position to tie them. Having completed the hardest maneuvers, she stepped back to the closet and pulled all the remaining garments over her head, giving a slight tug downward as they tended to tighten and stop at her large breasts. Most of the paper-bag ties had fallen out or were torn out by now, but she pulled out the few that were left and combed her hair straight back from her face. Her hair was beginning to grey just above the ears so that she had two puffs of steel wool on each side of her head, contrasting with the dark chocolate face. She pulled the top bureau drawer open dropping the comb in and pulling out a handkerchief to stuff in her bosom. Bishop McDaniel was always prepared on Sunday. She looked herself over one more time, especially admiring her soft Sunday shoes, before waddling slowly into the kitchen to eat her breakfast.

Before going to the table, she opened a door to the only other room of the house clucking loudly as she found Willy Buck sleeping soundly, hardly visible in the big bundle of quilts.

"Willy Buck, you gon' sleep all Lawd's Day. You git in at a decent hour on Sad'day and you could get up on Sunday. And you de son o' de bishop."

She wagged her head from side to side for a few minutes longer but arousing no response, she started out.

"See if you works on dat ca' dis aftanoon."

Finally giving up, she eased the door closed after her and sat down at the kitchen table. Since Sunday was a day of rest, she ate only what was already cooked from Saturday. That was cold beans, cornbread, and hamhocks. She ate the beans and cornbread, saving the hamhock for dinner after church. She ate each spoonful of beans carefully mashing them to a pulp with her tongue against her gums where teeth were missing. She then bit into the coarse cornbread, enjoying the prickling feeling against her newly massaged gums.

Suddenly feeling silly, she giggled to herself and gathered the dishes to put them in the sink.

It was ten before eight and she had to start her walk to church at precisely eight o'clock, so she started back for the bedroom to get her robe, coat, and *Bible*. Heaving the large coat up on her shoulders, she buttoned it all the way down and reached for her *Bible* on the bedside table. She shook her head several times more at the picture of Willy Buck and turned to leave. Her white, ministerial robe was hanging on a hook concealed behind the door. Lifting it down, she draped it carefully across her left arm covering the hand with her *Bible* in it.

Her congregation had collected money for weeks before Easter last year to buy her the new robe from Taylor's Uniform Shop in Raleigh. When she got it, she immediately promoted herself from Reverend Mother McDaniel to Bishop and everyone approved it or didn't disagree when she announced it. Only the younger members of her followers doubted her authenticity. Her explanation of hearing it straight from God was not enough for them and they still came to her church only to please their parents. Only her own son refused to come. He hadn't been for a year, but she still prayed for him every Sunday all alone before the congregation arrived.

It was exactly 8 o'clock as she started out the door yelling back to Willy Buck.

"Git yo'sef up Will'um. I wants ya in church."

It took her only thirty minutes to walk to church, even though she carried her weight like an old bear and resembled one from behind to cars that passed on the road. She followed the narrow path between the ditch and the road and thought up her sermons as she went. Mostly she depended on the Spirit to tell her what to say after she stood up and started it off. She walked with her head down watching her Sunday shoes appear and disappear behind her stomach.

As she turned in the muddy driveway to her church, she stopped to look at her name and title painted in dripping letters by the door, right under "The House of Prayer for All People." "All was in Capital letters and underlined. She smiled and looked up into the sky.

"Thank ya Jesus."

Unlocking the padlock, she pulled the chain aside and walked in as lightly as possible. She glanced around double-checking the cleaning she had done the day before, as she pulled off her coat and pulled on her robe before sitting on the last pew. She always sat here until everyone else came in. Mentally checking them off, she would plan to visit the ones guilty of backsliding during the next week. She knew ahead of time who had been sick the week before and probably wouldn't be there because of illness. Everybody else absent was assumed guilty until proven innocent, just like Willy Buck.

For the next half hour she prayed for forgiveness for Willy Buck's lack of attendance. Each Sunday she promised God Willy Buck was a good boy and he would come the next Sunday. Her brown face would turn up to the open rafters of the church and sun from the clear windows would sparkle over her face, which she rubbed with lard every Sunday morning to look her best for services. Sometimes she would stand for a few minutes and sway as she chanted her prayers, first shifting her weight to one foot and then to the other, her face still to the rafters. As her voice grew louder, she would sway farther and farther to each side, bending her knees slightly as she leaned to keep time.

"Jesus hep my Willy. Jesus forgives his children. Thank ya Jesus."

It was a few minutes before nine, when her followers began to come in and take their places. She smiled broadly and nodded to each as they came in, so that the sun glittered on her front gold teeth as well as her polished face. She waited until five after nine and then walked to the front to begin the first spiritual. As she turned at the front, she faced Willy Buck standing at the opposite end of the aisle in the rear. His belted London Fog was already unbuttoned with the belt pulled through the loops and buckled back around behind his back. Dressing in a hurry, he had put on the same purple bells and black shirt he had worn to town the night before; and the oversized, applejack hat was propped on his ear on the right side of his head as usual. He quickly slipped out of the coat and was about to slip into the back row, when the bishop noticed the cap in spite of her excitement.

"Take yo' hat off son . . . Thank ya Jesus."

Willy Buck grabbed the hat off, sitting down as quickly as possible. Joining in as his mother started the first spiritual, he stared out the clear windows, glad it would be a sunny day to work on his car.

LINDA HUDSON

TWO POEMS

As above clouds
We walk this white field.
The salty path
Crunches under our shoes.

Sterile blue atmosphere
Meets the white
In the gray ellipse
Of our horizon.

We crouch to touch
The sun sparkling crystals.
They break apart
And dust our shoetops.

Across this thirsty sea
We walk again,
Licking the taste
Of our dusty fingers.

Hand in hand,
Over the great salt flat,
We move our glistening feet
Toward the gray horizon.

Rotting apple core
Caught in crumpled newspaper
Shriveled red and brown,

Still moist and pungent,
Splotched with cigarette ashes
Like two squashed houseflies.

The flesh smelling like
Newly cut Jack O'Lantern
Withers on the core.

KATHY FETTER

NOBODY WINS ALL THE TIME

Amelia Swenson was the bane of my childhood
existence and for a long while after that because
she was always so terrifically good-looking
and built like a center-fold by the time she started ninth grade
(which caused quite a ruckus in the school that year)
when of course the beauty contest people got hold of her
and suddenly she was Miss Dixie Ham and Miss Gold Leaf Tobacco
with enough ham and cigarettes to stock
her father's store for a year
after which she won the Tri-county Queen of the May contest
and the three new dresses that went with it
not to mention Harvest Queen and a free turkey
and also queen of the Yanceyville Aquatic Festival
which presented her with a floating chaise lounge
and she was headed for even bigger things when
disaster befell her in the middle of her act in
the Miss Yanceyville contest
that she and everybody else knew she was sure to win
a mouse ran across the old stage
whereupon Amelia tripped on her tap-shoe ribbon
and fell flat on her face and broke her nose
which effectually disqualified her
and her nose healed with a big crook in it
so that now she's much uglier than I am but
I'm always nice to her when she waits on me
in the bakery because after all
I guess it could have happened to anybody.

MARIAN McGREGOR

BILL

There was never a time when he wasn't strong and powerful to me. I was always afraid of his temper. My father, being the strict disciplinarian with his keen sense of how a gentleman should conduct himself, would punish him for hitting any girl no matter how long she pestered him. My older sister and I did pick at him too. Then, when he would get fed up we would run screaming to my father. It always worked.

My father would say, "Bill I thought I told you never to hit these girls."

His voice would be booming and we would all be terrified. He seemed huge to me at those times. His face would be hard, the icy blue eyes gleaming. After he spoke his lips would be straight thin and tight. Anne and I would squirm with Bill waiting for him to speak.

"Wull, they messed up muh puzzle, Daddy."

"I don't care, if you hit one of them again I'm going to wear you out. I don't want to take my belt to you but I'll do it. Do you understand that?"

"Yes sir," he would mutter.

We rarely dared to fight again that night. We three would all sit quietly in the den watching anything on television. My father could be very frightening when he was angry.

Bill was tall, even then. He was skinny with light brown hair and big brown eyes that made him an appealing little boy.

As he grew older he began to spend a lot of time by himself walking, and hunting with Copper his golden spaniel. They knew the woods below our house perfectly. Time and again they followed its stream up and down. Often he would bring home dead snakes—the victims of his B-B gun—much to my mother's overt horror. She made sure she found out what kind of snake it was and, depending on the kind, she would react appropriately. Somehow it seemed an important ritual for them.

I was fascinated by him. He knew so much—he could make lanyards, he drew beautiful pictures and he could whistle so loud we could hear him coming long before we saw him carrying his gun up the hill from the dense woods below our house.

Sometimes he would take me with him. There would be no special invitation he would just say "D'you wanta cum?" in his gruffest voice trying to sound as though he didn't care.

If I said yes—and I never remember saying no—he would say, "Wull, hurry."

Often I would carry a picnic lunch for us, peanut butter sandwiches, coke in a thermos, cookies, anything. I would carry all of our equipment in case he needed to protect me or scout ahead. I remember the womanly feeling it gave me to pack napkins and a small checked tablecloth and spread it out for us to eat on. No matter how beaten our paths, it all seemed pioneering to me.

So, down the hill we headed, Bill led the way, then Copper, finally me lugging the basket and pumping my skinny legs to try and keep up with them. The woods had a huge field of hay in front of them. We would cross it briskly. If I slowed perceptibly he would turn, annoyed and say, "Cum on."

The grass would rustle, scratch and tickle as we passed, and little grasshoppers would snap and leap over and under, back and forth. The ground would have the scurrying noises of little animals trying to hide from the gun, Bill, Copper and maybe the basket.

Then suddenly we were in the woods. Large pines linked their branches with each other over our heads, leaving only mottled spots of sunlight on the ground. Everywhere the ground was either pine needles or lush vines—perfect homes for mammoth snakes and other things that bite in my opinion. It was no small annoyance to me to have Bill push through that stuff. We would move in deeper and deeper until we reached a stream. The water lapped and slid over moss-covered rocks that led into a deeper pool and then rushed out into pebble covered branches of the stream that met on the other side of a miniature island. It was here that he taught me how to catch crayfish, how to look in certain depths of water and under which kinds of logs. Salamanders were harder for me but he could always come up with one, black, slippery and prehistoric with its wet dinosaur body.

After a successful afternoon of seeing what was new or exciting that season Bill would find a good spot and I would sit up a picnic. He and Copper would scout while I set everything out. Then he would sit down across from me, Copper at his right elbow, ready for any morsel, wagging his tail in anticipation. Their eyes would look at each other in such admiration I knew there was no other love in the world greater than that of boy and dog. When he was finished he would settle back while I packed up and Copper would sit patiently while Bill looked for ticks and burrs.

In all our treks he never talked to me. I would ask him a question and he would answer me and that was it until the next time I needed him. I think he enjoyed seven-year-old prattle for he never asked me to stop—he just never encouraged me to continue.

I thought or rather I took it for granted that this is the way big brothers acted. George Wheeler, two doors down was like Bill, only meaner because he didn't have two sisters and so he didn't know not to be so rough with girls when he would catch us singing "Georgie Porgie Puddin' and Pie." Then he'd hit us if we dared continue. His problem was he had no sisters so his father must have not bothered to teach him boys should never hit girls. Aside from that, all boys were alike.

There were a lot of things I didn't know then. I did know there was school and how important it was to pass to another grade and be in red bird reading group because it was the best one. I had Miss Agatha Spellman in first grade and my mother told me she had taught Bill and my father in first grade.

"But how could she have been Bill's teacher? I saw his first grade picture and he had Miss Russell."

"Bill stayed in first grade another year to learn how to read better."

"Oh."

Two years in first grade, I thought. How did I know it was wrong to be two years in the first grade? But he was stronger, older, bigger than I, he always had been. It must be a mistake. No matter, he was a brother and all brothers are alike.

In second grade my parents gave me a JOLLY NUMBERS book. It was green, paperback with gay little clowns all over it holding blocks with fat numbers on them. I loved to work in that book.

Finally, I had worked all the problems and checked them through at least once. I turned to Bill in our den one afternoon and said,

"I'll be the teacher. Here you do this page and I'll correct it and give you a grade when you're through."

I went to sit in Daddy's lounge chair that had been his father's and watched "I Love Lucy" while he worked. Lucy and Ethel were trying to make Lucy look like a Spanish lady so she could try out for a part in Ricky's band. All I could think about was how dumb Lucy and Ethel were. Their plans never worked.

It was a hot fall afternoon. The seat of the chair sagged and the naugahide my mother had covered it in made the seat stisk to my legs. Sitting back, I could sink into the back of the chair. My legs were so far from touching the floor than only my feet and the lower part of my legs hung over the edge. I decided to correct my paper here. He handed it to me and I crossed my legs officially and started to work.

He never looked up from the TV when I left the room. Walking through the house, wondering what to do, I found my grandmother alone in the living room reading the paper. I leaned on the arm of her chair, its hardness against my stomach. She had had her hair fixed that day, the blue the hairdresser put on it seemed strange to me as I looked at its grey and white closely, noticing sparkles of hair spray in the afternoon sun that hit that side of the room.

"Gran?"

She put the paper down and her soft hand curved with age reached out for my arm leaning on the chair. It was blue, too, with veins and brown age spots and fingernails slightly yellow from tobacco. But soft, they were so soft as she stroked my arm up and back.

"Yes, Honey."

"Why do you put that bluestuff on your hair? It looks funny."

"To keep it from looking yellow. Grey hair turns yellow looking sometimes."

"Okay."

"Don't you like it?"

"Yes, I do." I squirmed uncomfortably under the question and that hand had now stopped stroking, resting heavily on my arm. In the silence that passed I heard the TV clicking into a new channel.

"Gran. I let Bill work a page in my JOLLY NUMBERS book and he missed almost half."

I was proud of my intelligence. She was looking at me and she knew my feeling but I didn't know hers—what was that expression I wondered.

Letting my eyes lower humbly I said, "Should I tell him his grade?"

"No," she was sharp in her tone, and "if he asks, tell him you get tired and didn't feel like finishing."

I left her sitting there. I hated turning around with my back to her because the eyes that had been looking at my face were coldly watching me walk away. I went upstairs into the den and sat down in the green chair again. I watched him for a long time.

Now when we sat at the table and my father would ask him about his walks I would notice the sound of his voice saying "free" birds instead of three. I was nervous around him. My girl friends would come over or I went there everyday. Houses were built on the old woods and I new saw the new ones he found. My father spent lots of time with him but I never talked to him and as usual he never talked to me. I was visiting my grand parents in Tennessee when I got the letter from my mother saying that a car had hit Copper and Bill carried him all the way home.

When he was to have been in ninth grade he went away to school. When he came home he would kiss me hello if I kissed him. If I didn't, he would act as though he had never been gone.

He grew tall—six foot three. He's at home again, but now I'm away. They say we look more alike than anyone else in the family.

I wonder if he remembers me in the woods as I d
him, reaching into the creek and crouching besid
waiting for the silt to settle. He never speaks of it
and I don't know how to ask. And there is so
ask of that non-smiling, non-frowning face. I
that now.

PAUL BAKER NEWMAN

AFTER FINALS

The mind reflecting in its eyes
plays in the sweat and breath
most delicate and easily
and rises easily to rhythms
feet swinging against the pavement
cool as air the body breathes.

The time is swirling past,
past into past whirling
like an eddy from an oar,
a good-looking fresh-faced girl
nodding at him in that com-
ical approving way not meaning
anything impertinent but just
saying farewell for the summer
and admiring herself in her
sleeveless shift and the sweat
scuffed lightly on her gleaming skin.

WILL RAVENEL

RATED X

(Scene 1: *Macbeth* and *Macduff* accidentally discover the *three witches* while walking through a dense forest.)

MACBETH: How oft when seemeth best the plight of man
When o'er the once-lived shadows deeply wrought
Upon the souls entomb'd within a plot
Of land no more the wayward, rolling dan.
'Sblood, we wander with a mourning stride
Across the stealthy, steaming trade of mind
And, stumbling through the undergrowth, we find
Betrayed us all that we had sought to hide.

MACDUFF: As when the lapwing sourly met withal
We plod before the mysteries fiercely shunned,
And all at once the favors we foretold
Have greeted us with nothing but our pride.

MACBETH: Saw you the night?

MACDUFF: I did. And by my troth,
What last we held within our brief defense
Has turned on us, and still we are uncross'd.

MACBETH: Be brief! I fear we greet with honest plight
Discourses of the wind, the shadowy night!

MACDUFF: Can that which has with hideous overtone
Destroy the hope which nestles in our hearts?
Or must we not defy what is not shown
To be the dark which not from heav'n has flown?

MACBETH: With all the grace which I have direly dressed
I bid you speak, or else be unconfess'd!

1ST WITCH: All hail Macbeth, with peasantry laughter!

2ND WITCH: All hail Macbeth, and aught before or after!

3RD WITCH: All hail Macbeth, the risen beam and rafter!

MACBETH: Why does this shake me so! When stars have crossed
To lead me blindly, wrongly to my grave!
(To Macduff) Did you not hear?

MACDUFF: I did. And that enough
To bid me on my way, and tender stuff. (Exit *Macduff)*

MACBETH: If liveth there unchannell'd in your breasts
The hideous trace of murther unconfess'd,
When every Eastern king has lost his riches,
And every mendicant is dead for stitches. (Exeunt *1st and 2nd Witches)*

3RD WITCH: Then lay thy bosom unadorned across the stone;
The nightingale shall meet it and be flown!

(Both *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* draw swords. A fierce battle ensues, and *Macbeth* is laid low by the swift sword of the *3rd Witch.)*

3RD WITCH: I thought thee drought! I add with waste,
Unshaven and unmannered and unchaste!

(She prepares the thrust which would kill *Macbeth,* but from *stage left* enters *Jesus.* A strong, bright light illumines him and his white clothing stands out with an unnatural brilliance.)

JESUS: Blessed be the peacemakers; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do. Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

(The *3rd Witch* hesitates, then stands and stares at the stranger. *Macbeth* stares awkwardly from the ground.)

JESUS: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Judge not, that thou be not judged. A sower went out to sow his seed. . .

(*Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* continue to stare. *Jesus* becomes a little disturbed and uncomfortable, but continues nevertheless.)

JESUS: Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but. . .

(*Jesus* pauses in mid-sentence. *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* are noticeably bewildered and a little frightened. *Macbeth* rises from the ground.)

JESUS: Not too impressive, was it? I'll bet you don't even have the faintest idea who I am. Some wierdo, maybe, some freak who just happened to come by to blow your minds. I'm not surprised, you know. I mean, one day you're a big deal and everybody knows you and you're a hero to every kid in the street. You meet all of the best people, you eat all of the best food, and you smoke all of the best dope. Then before you know it, it's all over—nobody knows you anymore, you know what I mean? I mean, you could be starving to death and you got no place to sleep, and you look around for a friend and nobody gives a rattling *damn* whether you live or die!

(*Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* continue to stare incredulously. *Jesus* sits down on a bench *downstage right*. *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* remain standing and continue staring.)

JESUS: I mean, I'm just not surprised. Nothing surprises me anymore. Things never seem to go my way. I mean you try all your life to be an ordinary human being, to have human traits and human faults, to be mediocre, and to do something wrong and be plagued with guilt. Is that too much to ask? I want to be ordinary, but I *can't* be ordinary. I can't have any real friends because I'm different from everybody else and everybody's always—*staring* at me and calling me names behind my back. "(mockingly) My, he's an odd fish, that one!" Well, it's not my fault that I'm perfect, and that's a fact. Nobody winds up being perfect because they want to be.

(The *3rd Witch* is visibly terrified and *Macbeth* draws her close and puts his arm around her to comfort her.)

JESUS: Being perfect sure does have me beat, let me tell you. All my life it's been one good deed after another. And if for a moment I somehow manage to diverge from that narrow road, my mother's right there to set me straight again. Did you know that when I was born I never cried? No, really! As if I didn't have reason enough to cry later on.

(*Blackout* on *stage right*. *Stage left* illuminated to reveal a carpenter's table. There are several carpenter's tools hanging from it. *Jesus* as a small boy, about eight years old, is sitting on the table and hammering a nail into a piece of wood. He has shoulder-length hair and a full beard. *Mary* approaches from extreme *stage left* and speaks.)

MARY: Jesus! I've been calling you for half an hour and scared half to death you'd run off somewhere. Why didn't you come when I called?

JESUS: Aw, gee, Mom. I just wanted to play, that's all.

MARY: And how many times have I told you not to come into your father's carpenter shop? Look at the size of those nails! What if you stepped on one, or the hammer slipped and you drove one of those things right through your hand? You'd bleed to death, and there wouldn't be anyone around afterwards to feel sorry for you.

JESUS: (happily) You mean I've done something wrong, Mama?

MARY: Well, no, I'm not saying it's wrong. (Jesus' smile disappears) I'm just saying that you might hurt yourself. You've plenty of time to mess around with nails and wood and such things when you're older. Now let's be a good boy and come on home. Supper's on the table.

Mary and the *Child Jesus* exit. Blackout. The lights go on *down stage right*. There is a kitchen table and a refrigerator, and *Mary* reappears from *stage left* wearing an apron, and mixing something in a bowl. *Jesus*, now a teenager, enters from *offstage right*. He has short hair, no beard, tennis shoes, white socks, black levis, and a white shirt. He has just returned from school and carries his books. The voice of the *adult Jesus* is heard over the loudspeaker:)

VOICE: But there were times in my life—especially during those turbulent teenage years when I tried, really *tried*, to be like everybody else my age.

JESUS: Hi, mom!

MARY: Hello, Jesus. How was school today? You didn't make any mistakes did you?

JESUS: (ignoring her question) Hey, Mom, I was wondering if it'd be o.k. if I went next door and played baseball for a while. I'd be home before supper and—

MARY: (interrupting) Jesus, sit down for a minute, will you? (She waits until he's seated and then resumes talking) Jesus, I've been meaning to speak to you about—well, about several things, frankly. Just look at you, your hair and your clothes.

JESUS: What's wrong with it? All the other boys have short hair. And Mrs. Penzold lets her boys wear white socks, and they're younger than *I* am.

MARY: Do I have to keep reminding you that you're not like everybody else? I've tolerated this short hair about as long as I can, and I won't stand for it any longer! You've had shoulder length hair and a beard all your life, and I'm not going to have—what's that?

JESUS: (uneasily) What's what?

MARY: That thing on your face!

JESUS: What thing on my face?

MARY: You know very well what thing on your face. (She bends down to get a closer look) A pimple! You've got a pimple!

JESUS: Aw, lay off, Mom. Lots of guys have pimples.

MARY: (angrily) You heal that thing this *instant.* (He applies a finger to his face.) Don't you *ever* let me catch you with pimples again, do you hear me? The idea! You know good and well that I've forbidden you to have pimples!

JESUS: (petulantly) I'm just trying to act like a normal human being, Mother. But how can I? You won't let me, No one else my age has long hair and a beard. No one else my age wears sandles. I go to school and everybody makes fun of me. And then when I finally get in a group and people don't seem to notice me, everybody starts talking about their fathers and what big shots they are and all. And they look at me and they say, "What's your father do, Jesus?" And, you know what I say? Well, I can't tell a lie, you know. I say, "He doesn't do anything. He's a dove." And they all laugh and they say, "What makes you think he's a dove?" And I say, "Because my mother *says* he's a dove." And they all laugh again. (Pause) You know, Mom, people are beginning to think we're a little *weird!*

MARY: (angrily) I don't *care* what people think and neither should you! Does it really matter all that much to you? O. K., if that's the way you want it, be mediocre. But you can't! You can't be mediocre because you're perfect. You can't be a lawyer or a doctor or a carpenter or any of those things because you're *Jesus Christ!*

(*Jesus* runs *offstage right. Mary* calls after him)

MARY: I want you to think of that, do you hear me! You're Jesus Christ and someday you're going to have to do something about it? Do you hear me?

(*Blackout.* The voice of *Jesus* resumes speaking on the loudspeaker. *Jesus* himself reappears lost in thought *downstage left* plodding slowly across the stage. The *Voice* speaks:)

VOICE: She was right—I couldn't escape it. I was Jesus Christ and there was nothing I could do about it. I grew my beard back, and my hair again fell to my shoulders. I walked around for years healing the sick and raising the dead, but still feeling empty inside, as if nothing I did had any meaning. What I needed was something to believe in. But I had no faith in anything, until one day—the day I discovered—Tinkerbelle.)

(The lights dim and *Tinkerbelle* appears. She is nothing more than a quickly flickering ray of light.)

VOICE: I decided to believe in fairies. And so for years Tinkerbelle was my constant companion, never leaving my side. She was even willing to die for me on the cross! It's not so bad being Christ and all if you know someone else is going to die for you. But one day, while we were walking across the Sea of Galilee, Tinkerbelle went under. I rescued her and took her ashore.

(The light flickers increasingly more slowly. *Jesus* walks down to the end of the stage and appeals to the audience.)

JESUS: Tinkerbelle's going to die. But we can save her! All of you who believe in fairies can help. If you believe in fairies, clap your hands. The more peo-

ple there are out there who believes in fairies, the stronger Tinkerbelle will get.

(Jesus starts clapping and, presumably, so does the audience. Seconds later *Tinkerbelle* flickers a few more times, then goes out completely.)

JESUS: She's dead! Tinkerbelle's dead! (to audience, angrily) Was it too much to ask? All I wanted was for you to believe in fairies. But all you did was clap! Did you think that's all it would take to keep her from dying? A small favor—believe in fairies. But none of you did. You just clapped! *All you did was clap!*

VOICE: I recalled wondering in desperate unreason whether Tinkerbelle might still be alive somewhere, whether some awful curse did actually hang over all the Christs, whether there was some justifiable reason for me to doubt what had happened, whether somehow the awful weight of this incredible instant might in some way pass from my shoulders. I was overcome, I am frank to say, by a jumble of emotions—grief, fear, doubt, exhaustion, panic, confusion, and shock. . . I suddenly jumped into the Atlantic Ocean and impulsively swam across, nearly drowning several times in the effort.

(Jesus runs from *stage left* across to *stage right,* which is shrouded in darkness. *Blackout stage left* as *stage right* is again illuminated. *Jesus* stands once again with *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch,* who are rapt withal.)

JESUS: And this is where I am today. Wandering around, healing, preaching, but none of it makes sense any more. It's no fun being the Son of God, believe you me, no fun at *all!*

(Pontius Pilate appears from *upstage center.* He is dressed like a policeman, only very sloppily.)

PILATE: Time's up, Jesus. Let's go, boss.

JESUS: Time to go already? Well, I won't fight it anymore. (to *Macbeth* and *3rd Witch)* It was nice talking with you. You know how it is—never any time to sit around with friends when you want to. Let's go, then.

(Jesus and *Pontius Pilate* exit. *Upstage center* is a cross with *Jesus* upon it. Several people stand below it cheering. The light blacks out and the people turn around and walk *downstage center.* They stand in a line across the stage, their heads bowed. A few people appear to be crying. Over the loudspeaker a *voice* speaks.)

VOICE: (from Vanilla Fudge's "The Beat Goes On". *Blackout.* During the blackout the voices of children count from one to forty, one child counting "one", two counting "two", three counting "three", and so on. At the end all of the children cheer, and the lights go on *downstage. Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* walk hand in hand, eye to eye, from *downstage left.)*

MACBETH: When all the leafy, miscast thoughts are gone,
When nights of book breath find their day of rhyme,
Whene'er the rabble's voices still the seas,
Then shall be breach the promises we keep.

3RD WITCH: And I, when evenings whisper love's sublime
And tend'rest echoes, mortal doubts shall cease.
The silence we demand enshrouds what we have lost,
In spite of all the pain within our hearts.

(Jesus, his *wife,* and their two *children* enter *stage right.* Each of the four carries a cross strapped to their backs. *Jesus* indicated a place where they will sit, and they remove their crosses from their backs. His *wife* removes a checkered tablecloth, a bag of bagels, and some cream cheese from hers. Once settled, they pass out the bagels and *Jesus* provides the knife for spreading the cream cheese. He notices *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch* standing in awed silence on the other side of the stage.)

JESUS: (to *Macbeth and 3rd Witch)* Like to try a bagel? They're quite good, really.

(Macbeth and the 3rd Witch hesitate, then approach Jesus and accept his offer)

JESUS: Please have a seat. (to his *wife)* Darling, will you pass me the cream cheese and the knife, please? (She hands *Jesus* the cheese and the knife, and he hands them to *Macbeth)* Here. Now just spread a little of this cheese stuff on your bagel before you eat it.

MACBETH: (bewildered) 'Sblood! Thy death betimes hath. . .

JESUS: (interrupting) My death? Oh, *yes!* My death! That's a really very interesting story, that death business. Remind me to tell you about it someday. Fact of the matter is, I came back for awhile, but I'll be leaving today. Thought I'd spend a little time with my family before I go.

JESUS' SON: (looking offstage, excitedly) Daddy! Daddy! Someone's coming!

JESUS: I was afraid of this.

(Two *Reporters* and a *Photographer* enter *stage right*. The *photographer* takes a few photographs and leaves while the following conversation takes place.)

JESUS: Can't you people leave me alone? Can't a man spend his last day on earth alone with his family and friends (indicates family and *Macbeth* and the *3rd Witch)* without you people butting in all the time?

REPORTER: Sorry to interrupt your little gathering, gentlemen and ladies, but we're from the *New Testament* and we'd like to ask you a couple of questions before you go.

JESUS: (reconsidering) Well, all right then. What do you want to know?

REPORTER: Now that you're about to leave earth and ascend into heaven, our readers would like to know what your plans are for the future.

JESUS: (pauses briefly to consider the question) The future? Well. I guess the first thing I'd like to do, once I get to heaven and all, is to go see my Father. (with great feeling) I've never known my Father, you know, and. . . and when I see him, I'd like to sit on his right hand.

REPORTER: I see. And have you any regrets about you role on earth? That is, would you evaluate your performance here on earth as successful or unsuccessful?

JESUS: (sadly) I think it's pretty obvious, isn't it? I mean, you knock yourself out for thirty years, and you get no rest, and when you finally die and you think, well, now it's over, now I'll go to heaven and I won't have to worry about it anymore. And what happens? Three days later you're on your feet again, and the whole rotten business starts over for another forty days. Well, it's over now, and I'll be gone soon. (He hesitates. Everyone is very still, and they watch *Jesus* with great awe.)

JESUS: But I can't help wondering—after all the pain, after all the heartache, the sleepless nights, the hunger, the disappointment, and the bloodshed—does anyone really care?

3RD WITCH: (embracing him) But, Jesus, don't you see? We *love* you!

(Jesus stands confused and amazed as from *stage right* and *stage left* come several recognizable people—*Superman, Peter Fonda,* the *Tin Woodsman, Mike Maloy,* etc.—who come up to *Jesus* and either shake his hand warmly or embrace him. During this scene the last 1½ minutes of the King's song "Arthur" plays.

—CURTAIN—

JANE MILLER

MUSINGS IN CHURCH

A white walled mirage
of the excuse for man's failure.
Expanse, depth, strength
High ceiling.
God
How this place takes
you around what
you should go through.

JOEL ARSENAULT

DO THE NINE PLANETS

Do the nine planets
sail like
slave ships or sloops
farther out to closer in
their fated run?

If the exuberant old earth
is its own painted sloop
then turtle snake and toad
dizzying out from their sleep
under rocks
are green sailors
hitting deck for the first time (ever)

And yet truffle hounds couldn't
sniff me out, underground
my why works as mute
as truffle root
exquisite but dumb
why is as blind
as potato eye

I'll wait for a sign
bland or telling
of wind or root
for how the nine planets
sail their fated run
makes me
sailor or slave

JEANICE TOWSON

WISDOM MOVES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

The slick-skinned green amphibian
with spots
Lies helpless in dissecting pan
the ventral portion up
and legs out-stretched
In tense rigidity.

You think he's dead? we thus begin
to carve up and dismember him.
still full of essence
in the jumps and stalls
of movement in the muscle walls.
One nictitating eyelid falls
and leaves a brilliant gleaming ball
with tears.

The easy feel of knife in hand
while slicing through some useless band
of tissue
Invites its master to a higher realm
Without which he would never find
the Sterner Reaches of the Mind.

How cheap the cost of wisdom
just one life
in scientific sacrifice.

CATHIE HENSON

RECOLLECTION

The only thing that was more exciting than the Rink were the times you'd take me midnight froggigging in the marsh with galoshes on. In fact, I can't remember a Saturday in all those years that we weren't there at the Cavalaris—wide-eyed and giggling, our hearts thumping and bodies trembling with excitement, brother and sister, sharply sucking in the thrills of the Cavalaris Rink.

As soon as we'd snatch greasy tickets and move through the bars that buzzed open, inhale deliriously the smells of the popcorn and sweat that thwacked us in the face, there was always the scramble to get in line for skates.

It was funny, but the minute you walked in the door—no matter how many times you'd been there before, you felt like a total stranger. It was like you could never become a part of the place. Everyone moved on skates at the Cavalaris—the ticket man and skate man, the refreshment stand waitress, the referee, the manager, so even in the lobby we saw another world of people rolling instead of walking.

And until you rolled too, the others would ignore you. They'd kind of look hard at you and skate almost into you like you weren't even there, so we'd have to jump back to keep from getting hit! (Of course if you were on skates, you could roll easy). But after your skates were on, you could almost feel yourself blending right in with the crowd. You became a part of everyone else equal at least with all the rest. So it was understandable about the big rush for the skate line—to make ourselves acceptable to the Cavalaris crowd just as soon as possible.

I took a four and you a seven. It was embarrassing to have to yell out your size when you'd come there a lot: if you had a face at all, the old skate man would know your number after two or three times. But sometimes he'd pretend not to remember: "What's yours?" he'd ask just to rile us. He glided along behind the counter from size to size on his own skates, never looking at our faces, except when he rolled the pair tied together across the counter top to us. You always got black ones, and mine were white.

Oh, the feel of those skates! That's something I won't forget: fat rubber blobs at the toes for stopping—hard and pink like a pencil eraser, the smooth leather, soft and crinkled, with grey creases in the whiteness from all the other feet that had been lacing them for years; (long, slick tongues dangling exhaustedly from the mouths at the top of the skates) hooks, sharp and curved, for the shoe strings and thick wooden wheels, jiggling and purring in my hands as I spun them.

Those tired living things we slid on our feet, bending with the others on the two facing rows of benches in the lobby. It was always a race between us to see who could be on our feet first. I was first only once out of the crowd, but you were it many times. I remember you saying, "Let's go, kid. See ya on the floor," sort of loud, so the others would know you were up and I admired you for it. You skated away easily and disappeared through the door to the real excitement. While I finished poking my laces through the holes, the pros slipped colored stretchy socks over their feet—white and black, some baby blue and hot pink to match sequinned outfits. The older girls finished fastening furry pom-pons to their ties and then I was ready.

Remember how it was? Once through that door, we were in still another world. The room whirred, aglow with the action of breeze and colors and bodies. Walls papered with aluminum foil screamed cheapness, and the glare intensified the odors and music but we were blinkly ecstatic. A huge chandelier made of tiny chips of mirror turned slowly in the center of the ceiling; the whole globe made bright patterns on the floor and walls where light hit it and bounced off. An almost unbroken railing encircled the huge wooden floor; behind it parents chewed the fat and cocked proud eyes at their show-off kiddies.

With each grouping of skaters, separate worlds whizzed around and around the room deliriously. Standing still for a second, we were bombarded with crescendos of conversation—meteors of the little worlds in bits of their lives flung as the paired skaters floated by, then dying as they swept further around . . . until the next couple flashed before us. Stopped there at the railing while the skaters' noises hit me in disjointed chords, it was just like stopping and unstopping your ears rapid-fire to make funny faces of unconnected roars inside your head. From our place at the side, we watched the masses, coasting at the corners, then building speed again. And suddenly we'd dive in, heads lowered, elbows bent high and jerking from side to side, feet flying, wheels scratching at the floor, all in an effort to keep the pace of the flow of traffic.

It was one-way traffic; it had to be or the ref would throw you out. He was an old professional, but, still spry in the Rink.

He could do a lot of tricks and even dance on his wheels. He wore all black, and a silver whistle hung from his neck. He'd weave in and out of the even rush on the floor, tapping people on their shoulders and shaking his head. You and I were determined that he was an ex-con given a clean start by the Cavalaris manager, but for as long as we were there, he was just fine, even minding everybody's business for them. And he always swooped in behind the beginners catching them by the armpits before they hit the floor.

Within the core of the revolving bodies he policed, the pros clustered, practicing fancy maneuvers out of the mainstream of skaters. There was no rope or rule outlawing amateurs from the center; you just knew it wasn't done. Stella and Roy would be there, perfecting their routine: two doubles around, partners rejoin, a dip, kick, shift, and back to dance position. My idol was Sheila McBee, who skated backwards in the center circle, reading a book of Olympic routines like she didn't even notice the stunts she was performing. But even trying my hardest, I could never get my red skating skirt to ripple up gently as hers did with every dip. Around and around, again and again, we all skimmed to the varying rhythms and moods of the jolting music which blared fuzzily from the speakers imbedded in the ceiling.

Inside the blue-tinted glass booth in the corner, Old Pop twirled 45's on his two forefingers—actually one and a half, remember? He lost half of one a saw. They told us his wife wouldn't let him touch her since the accident except with his right hand. We thought it was neat. He'd reach for the microphone in his glass booth, tap its perforated top with his nub, and exhale into it, "Ladies' choice. You men get off now. Ladies' choice."

Then you had to sit out, and I scooted around alone. Some of the teenagers chose clumsy boys to hold hands with criss-crossed promenade style and away they went, squealing with pleasure as the boys jerked them outside around each corner turn. Mrs. Presnell would be pushing herself around on the railing since she'd only had a few lessons. That little four-year-old mostly scrambled on her knees as her mother held her up by the arm. Stray older girls coasted about bobbing their heads and shaking their hips as they attempted the popular dance steps on skates, but I wouldn't dare. On a ladies' choice, there was always more room, and keeping double time to the record, I'd dash about the Rink in a frenzy.

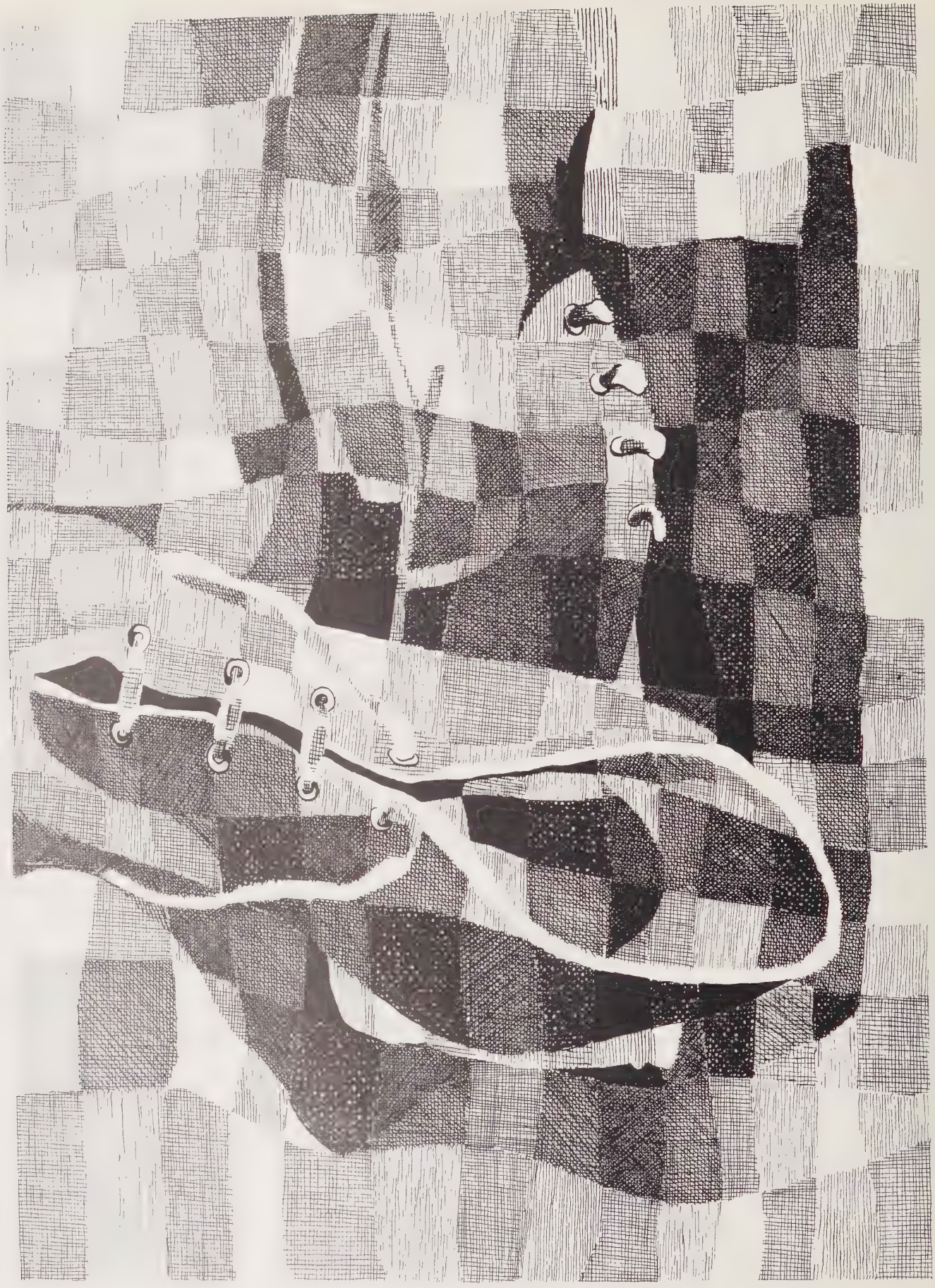
"Men's choice! I say, men's choice, little ladies." Old Pop always interrupted my bliss, and you'd take my place on the floor. Some of the girls stayed up, because they knew they'd get picked by the men, but the rest of us cluttered into the parents' gallery.

It was thrilling to watch you circling alone out there, placing each foot carefully for the cross-steps. You never smiled, but, just like all the other men, you wore the look of professional aloofness that seemed so cold and powerful to me. It wasn't the look I knew you by, but it was how I thought a true skater should appear. "That's my brother," I'd point you out to the women next to me.

And how can I forget our favorite days? On some Saturdays, the contests were held. While the older folks were judged on couple dances and solos, we struggled with relay races—skating down and sitting on balloons until they popped. Always the prizes were pink or white marshmallow bunnies in cellophane wrappers—whether it was Easter or not. Old Pop said he just liked bunnies when you asked him why.

And after the games, we'd return to the lobby to spend the dimes Momma had given us. Unless you were mad at me for acting like a baby, you'd get an orange drink, and I'd get popcorn, and we'd divide them equally between us. There were little piles of dingy grey popcorn in the corners of the lobby and around the juke box. On particularly dizzying afternoons, Jackie Thompson would dart out to the lobby, press a nickel into the juke, tilt her head back and squeeze her eyes shut, and wriggling every inch of her body supported on her skates, scream, "I feel like dancing!" Soon a skinny young man with his shirt unbuttoned on a pasty chest, and a cigarette flapping from his lips would glide to her side, and they'd work themselves into a sweat before the first song was over.

Everyone returned to the Rink after that. We were cooled off then and anxious for a few more hours of delirium. Bodies lurching as we circled and spirits popping with the electricity of the Cavalaris like crazed kinfolk, drunk off every sensation about us. There was a kind of unity in the separate strangers there. Together jostling bodies, smiling shyly, and gasping from the astonished way it left you—like the shock of cold water on flesh that leaves you breathless, we became one. Somehow in that fever, we were a family.



BETTY ADCOCK

DREAM OF THE TENTH YEAR

The rub of one summer warms a white room.
Sticks I gathered with my grandfather
flare in my sleep. Shadows on the ceiling
bloom green and speared with sun.
Again we are walking by a creek
where the fish turn around and come back.

This time we cannot stop them.
They slip like a handful of dropped dimes
through sudden cracks in the water, past
hooks feathering the dark before I was born.
I feel the leaves overhead clench. I wake
remembering that I did not bring food.

WILL RAVENEL

UNTITLED

Jimmer realized as soon as he entered the lobby that the girl at the switchboard was too preoccupied with other people to get Sarah on the intercom, so he decided to make himself comfortable in the meantime. He sat down in a chair near the door, kicked off his tennis shoes, and removed his glasses from a pocket and balanced them neatly on the end of his nose. From his jacket pocket he withdrew a small notebook and a ballpoint pen and began writing at the top of the first blank page:

> "Your honor," continued King with ironic deference to the white man who looked down on him from behind the bench like a bored nun, "this courtroom—and I think it should be noted in the records that by this I mean the people *within* this courtroom, since the courtroom itself is only a room with a lot of chairs, a few tables, a couple of pitchers of water, and some air, and should therefore in no way be construed as the target of my remarks *per se*—this courtroom has not once—as I have noted—but on several occasions been the unconscious victim of a brutal miscarriage!" King stepped back from the bench and turned swiftly to face the courtroom spectators who now sat upright like school children, all of them silent as death, with the exception of one slightly-built, longhaired youth who fidgeted in his seat throughout the entire proceedings, eating fishsticks and quoting Latin declensions. At a given

"Excuse me, can I get someone for you?" He looked up into the fat red face of the desk girl.

"What—no, that's O.K., I was—I mean, *yes!* Sarah Butler, on the uh, second floor. No, *third* floor."

"Second floor," she said, turning to the intercom and flicking a switch. O.K. then, dammit, the second goddamn floor. He looked away from her and read and re-read what he'd written so far and decided that it wasn't any good. But it could have been great, he thought, if that bitch hadn't—well, have to start on something else, I suppose. Something good and lurid for a change.

> The savage desk girl flung her incredible body upon him like a thrill-crazed animal, nostrils flared, lips quivering with desire, her eyes crying, "Hurt me!" as she tore the flimsy Villager blouse from her breast and hurled it across the room. In an instant she was naked, save for the see-through Weejuns which clung tightly to her feet in just the right

"Are you Jimmer?" interrupted the desk girl. He sighed without looking at her and put his notebook away.

"Yeah. Is she in?"

"Her roommate says she's on her way down. I hate to do this but would you mind putting on your shoes? It's a rule, not me, they just—"

"Look, I'm real sorry but I've been driving all afternoon and I'm tired, O.K.?"

"I'm sorry but it's a rule," she said stubbornly. "The rule says—"

"O.K., O.K., I'll put them on, just don't say another word." He picked up his tennis shoes and slipped them on again indignantly. This girl is sick, he thought. Probably picks her nose in the library. Seconds later Sarah walked into the lobby and gave him a hug. She seemed really happy to see him.

Putting on a faded green army jacket she said to him, "I think we better go outside for awhile, Jimmer. I want to talk with you." They left the dormitory and walked through the parking lot toward the tennis courts. Sarah directed his attention to the hillside behind the other end of the courts.

"Unless you'd rather drive around somewhere off-campus, we can sit up there and talk." She took his hand in hers, and he shook it loose. After a moment she added, "It's kind of nice up there—kind of a nice view of the campus and all."

"Yeah, O.K., let's go up there. I'm a little tired of driving."

They plodded up the hill until they came to a tree about halfway to the top. They sat down, and Sarah stretched out on her back. Jimmer looked out over the campus. Surrounding the buildings, lake, and playing fields on three sides was part of a mountain range. The sun was easing down behind them, and the air was becoming noticeably cooler.

"Gets dark pretty early here," Jimmer said after a pause.

"Yes it does," she said from the ground. "The mountains cut off about an hour of sunlight." She sat up and looked at him, and he watched the sun and the mountains. "I got your letter."

"I'm glad. Just goes to show you that a good postman, like a good raincoat, won't ever let you down." He followed the path of the sun until it disappeared. "That girl sitting at the desk wouldn't let me take my shoes off in the lobby."

"It's a rule," she said. "They won't let you walk anywhere on campus without shoes."

"Well, shit, the way she acted you'd think I had plant blight or something."

"Why don't you want to talk, Jimmer?" she asked. "You used to like to talk with me."

"I'm talking with you, aren't I?"

"Well, you're not saying anything," she said. "You've really changed."

"So have you."

"I know." She lay on her back again and exhaled deeply. "We're not the same people we were two years ago."

"No, we're not. So what?"

"It's been a long time since we last saw each other. Almost a year. I hear about you all the time." She hesitated. "Everybody says you lost your mind and all. You haven't been doing anything, have you?"

"Not since last spring. I don't do anything at all. I don't even drink anymore." He reached for a cigarette, but decided against it. "I don't smoke anymore either. I don't even *date,* for Christ's sake."

"You don't date? Not at *all?* God, if I were a boy I'd be screwing every girl in sight." She removed a cigarette from the pack in her jacket pocket and lit it. "Why don't you date anymore?"

"I don't know, I just don't feel like it, that's all. Maybe I'm queer. All I do nowadays is hang around the bathrooms at school." A small and grossly underfed English setter came sniffing by and nuzzled his head in Jimmer's crotch. Jimmer scratched the dog's head and under his ears, and the dog licked his face. He saw his only opportunity to say something profound. It didn't seem to bother him that Bernard Shaw had thought of it first, "You know, Sarah, there are times when I really envy dogs. I mean, I don't wish I *were* one or anything like that. It's just that I find the love that I need lavished on dogs and cats and such things, and they don't do anything to deserve it. They get it because they ask for it, and they're not afraid to ask for it. But those of us who really need love don't get it because we're cowards."

Sarah was silent and appeared suitably affected by his remarks. The dog sniffed along the inside of Jimmer's leg, snorted, and trotted off downhill toward Sarah's dormitory. "Well, it's your own fault," she said. "If you'd bother to go out and date once in a while, maybe you'd find someone. You're not going to, you know—find love unless you make an effort to look for it."

"Yes, I can see it now." He stood up and deepened his voice like a radio announcer introducing a soap opera: "And now, listeners, we continue with the never-ending saga of Jimmer Randlett, former dope-addict-gone-straight, now combing the world in his apparently futile search for love. His near-fatal case of psoriasis cured, he begins—"

"That's enough, Jimmer."

"—he begins a new this week, relentless as ever. As our story opens he stands naked atop Mount Ararat, screaming his now famous, near-immortal cry of "Stoned at last, thank God Almighty I'm stoned at—"

"Go to hell, you bastard, go straight to hell!" Jimmer stopped and looked at her for the first time that day. "I'm not sorry we quit dating anymore," she continued. "You can't say anything nice in your letters, and when you finally come see me, you don't even try to make sense. You talk about wanting to be loved and then you just turn right around and make shit out of it *and* me!"

Her eyes were filling with tears. Jimmer turned away again and looked in the direction of her dormitory. The parking lot street lights came on and a bell rang from atop another building nearby, probably the dining hall. "I'll make out all right," he said distantly. He watched as several dormitory windows went black. Some girls began trickling out of the front door and walking together towards a large complex of buildings nearby. "Is it time for supper or something?"

"Yes, you'll make out just fine, won't you?" she said bitterly. "Last year I took about all I could take, and then after a while I just decided that I couldn't take anymore. I'm too young to waste my time being unhappy all the time. I used to cry about it and then all of a sudden I just stopped crying."

"You ran out on me," he said simply. He turned towards her. "When I needed you most, you weren't there. You ran out on me." He looked at her eyes again. Once, a year ago, she had closed them and asked him what color they were. He had answered, "Kinda blue." They were green.

"Yes, I ran out on you."

"So you started dating what's-his-name."

"So I started dating Lyman. But not right away. Not really until I came to school in the fall."

"And now you're in love again."

"Yes."

Jimmer threw up his hands in exasperation. "That bastard is probably the biggest —*lunchpail* I've ever known! How could you possibly be in *love* with him?"

"He asks me the same thing about you, you know."

"So what do you tell him?" The setter had returned for another scratching, but Jimmer ignored him.

"I tell him that once you were very nice." She reached down and stroked the back of the dog's neck. The dog sat down and beat his tail on the ground and yawned. No one said anything for about a minute. The dog lay down on his side. Sarah knelt down to scratch his stomach.

"Do you still have that notebook?" she asked after a long silence.

"What notebook?"

"The one you were always writing in. The one with all the stories and things in it that you never let me s

"I don't have it anymore."

"I wanted to read it."

"I don't have it anymore. I decided not to mess with it anymore."

She stood up. "Why not?"

"Because I was creating my own little fantasy world, and I decided that I should return to reality. The notebook just made things worse."

"Is that way you're such pleasant company? Because you've gone back to reality?" It was getting colder now, sa Sarah zipped up her jacket. Jimmer noticed that with the jacket zipped up, her hips stood out more prominently.

"It's a different trip. I don't need all those illusions to make my life liveable. That's why I don't feel like I have to go out and date—I don't have to go out and reassure myself of my masculinity. Girls just add to the fantasy of life. Or you might say that I'm just taking the advice of our first President: 'no entangling alliances.' "

"That doesn't make any sense at all," she said, "although it's not surprising, coming from you. It would seem to me that being by yourself all the time would just add to your fantasies."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't elaborate," he said. "I can't expect you to see what I mean without drawing you a picture, and I haven't got the time to do it." He looked at his watch. Mickey's big hand was on the one and his little hand was pointing at the seven, slightly brushing his right foot. "I've got to get back to school, Sarah. I've got a paper due tomorrow, and I've got to stay up all night."

"Well, when can you come see me again, then?"

"I'm not coming again. I just came by to say goodbye. 'The train stops at Chicago' and all that shit."

"Is it all right with you if I just write you then?"

"Why don't we just admit we made a mistake and forget that it ever happened, O.K.? There's no point in dragging this thing out any longer than we have."

They looked at each other for a few moments. Sarah shrugged and said all right and turned away and started walking back down the hill. Jimmer and the dog remained together beneath the tree, watching her. She turned around and asked him if he were coming.

"No, you go on ahead. I'm going to stay up here with the furry animal for a while." He paused for a few moments and added, "Supper bell rang a long time ago. Guess you'd better hurry."

She waited for a second or two, then left. It was so dark now that he could barely see her. When he was sure that she was inside her dormitory, he and the setter walked down the hill to where his car was parked. He opened the front door on the driver's side, and the dog jumped into the front seat and sat down. Jimmer got in and shut the door.

He scratched the dog's neck and chest vigorously. The setter closed his eyes and broke into a kind of smile. "You like that, don't you, you old sensualist," Jimmer said. He started the car and drove out the front gate.

I should have been a pair of ragged claws, he thought, like a lobster. Nothing to do but grope along all day and satisfy your basic hungers. Well, maybe not a lobster. A rabbit. I wonder if rabbits get any sexual pleasure from intercourse? I guess they do, or they wouldn't do it so much. "Hey, couldn't you see two rabbits lying side by side after intercourse, exhaling real hard, their ears all limp and all?" he asked the dog. Jimmer chuckled and looked over at the dog who was still smiling, and they both stared straight ahead, not saying anything.

KENT SHAW

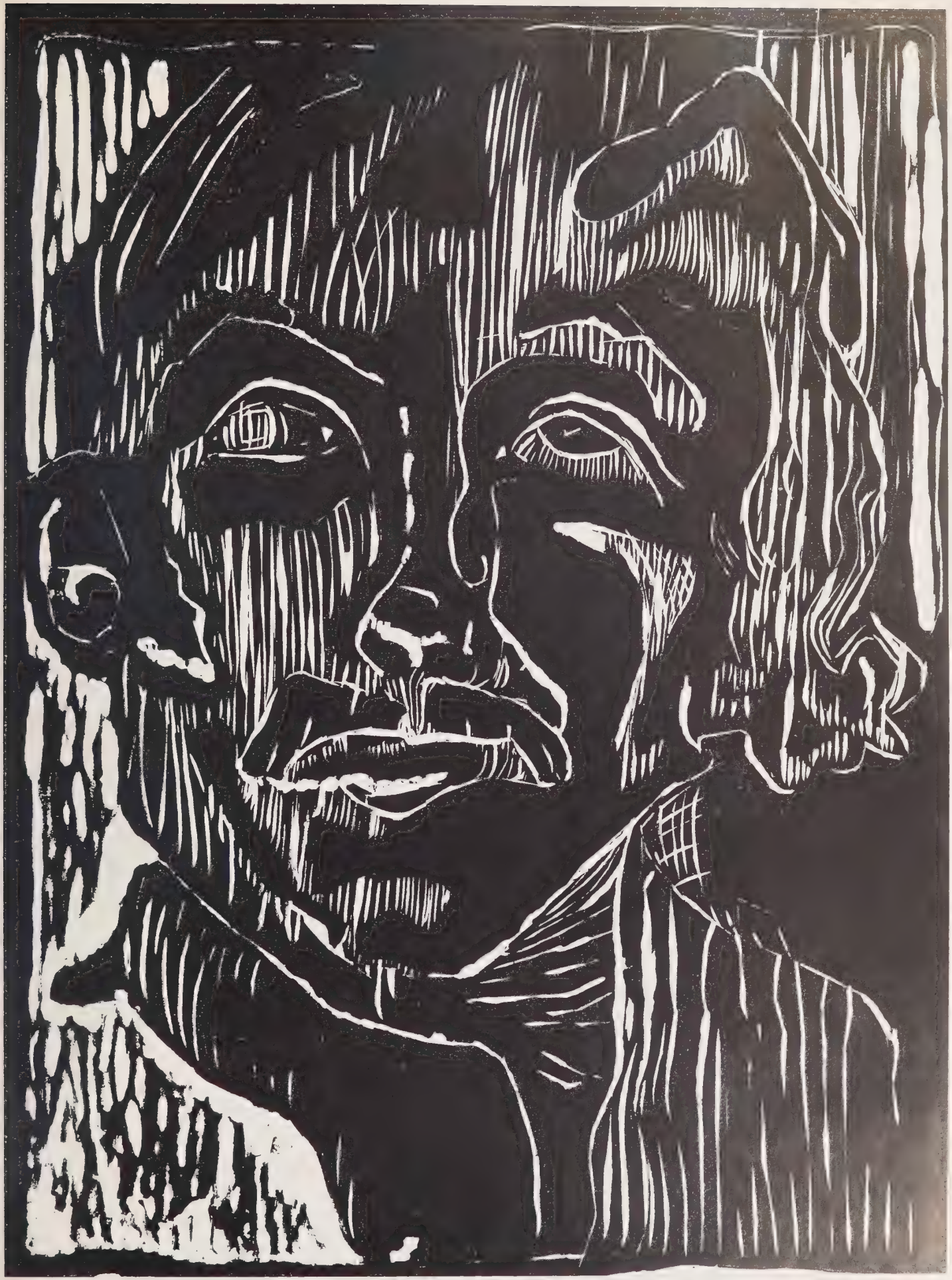
MIRI

**Miri*

Images of continual grace pressed down a hand,
Gently wiping the plates for the holding on.
Soon my Miri will just be gone awhile.

Thirsty blue stone will scorn the foot.
She'll be having her own time in the distance.
Soon my Miri will just be gone awhile.

Tonnage of rooftops touring through sun air,
Trying to hold the sadness we may share.
I am thinking I should sleep well;
But tinkling bells on the door for notice have awakened,
And soon my Miri will just be gone awhile.



KATHY FETTER

WANDA GORKY'S YEAR OF BLISS

One balmy summer night
As Wanda Gorky sat in her room
Playing her cello and
Watching sequences of sharply focused
Notes parade before
Her thick concave lenses
The telephone rang and
Love entered her sterile young life
In the form of skinny bespectacled Edwin McMahan,
Class brain and Wanda's fellow
Cello player since childhood.
Shyly Edwin muttered that
Mr. Ciompi had said that it
Would be nice if they learned some
Duets for the Labor Day music festival;
Wanda acceded somewhat awkwardly but pleasantly and
Thus the Great Match, conceived under the auspices
Of Bach and Beethoven and Mr. Ciompi,
Came into being.

They began practicing every afternoon
Shaping and polishing the music
Until it shone with their enthusiasm,
And out of furtive spectacle-cloaked glances
Across their music stands
Something beautifully tender and unspoken emerged.
General concensus was that they were the
Highlight of the music festival and as
Wanda and Edwin blushed with pleasure
Everyone encouraged them to continue
Toward bigger and better things.

Their world was beautifully harmonious that fall
And by the time the Christmas Concert came
The glow in Wanda's eyes
Was matched only by the brightness
Of the electric star of Bethlehem.
However, as the stars waxed brighter
Behind Wanda Gorky's lenses
Fate was working a more external change on Edwin
Whose voice was cracked and plummeted
As his shoulders began to broaden.

Rehearsing for the Spring Concert
Wanda and Edwin discovered Beethoven's "Scherzoso"
Which promptly captured their hearts
Their imaginations and soon
Most of their practice time—
It sounded the very depths of their
Mutual sensitivity as no other piece had
Ever done and people actually
Cried when they played it in the concert,
Which made Wanda very happy.
The Junior Prom was a month and a half away.

But as the sap rose and the birds sang
Other girls were also beginning to notice
The transformation of erstwhile
Skinny bespectacled Edwin McMahan
And Edwin was beginning to notice
That they were noticing;
He suggested to Wanda that they
Cut their afternoon practices to twice a week
For there were no more concerts and
He could use some free time.
Wanda watched helplessly as Edwin lost interest
Even in Beethoven's "Scherzoso" which
Had long since become dear to Wanda Gorky's heart.

Edwin took Susan Farrington to the Prom
And his blossoming social life eventually
Culminated in his announcing to Wanda that
He was giving up music "for a while."
Wanda acceded somewhat pleasantly but awkwardly
And with a sigh of disappointment she
Released the only love of her life.

The summer came balmy and green
And as the scent of hyacinths and
Newly mown grass wafted up through
Her window at night
Wanda Gorky sat in her room
Watching her bedpost through
Misty concave lenses and
Playing Beethoven's "Scherzoso"
On her cello.

FRED CHAPPELL

QUARTET

Clarinet

Straight
talk from
a pretty
girl is hard to
take.

Too
candid,
too naked,
too full of heart
ache.

Piccolo

Mouse
that twitters
in the house
of mosquitoes.

Harp

The fingers climb the ladders
of Rapunzel's glowing hair,
spilling mercurial cherries from
the baskets of her palms.

Or a daddy longlegs
choosing deliberately between
a quarter-inch of plumbless void,
an immutable silk thread.

Double Bass

Impossible to be in
a room with alone.

Mostly belly and as awk
ward as a Tuesday morning drunk.

Everything he says he underlines.

(I had an uncle like that.)

MARTHA TALLEY

Phil sat in his library chair, staring at the book in front of him, without seeing it. Around him were the noises of people going about their business, students walking across the room, rustling their papers and snapping their books shut, and the loud voices of the librarians. Across from him Kay stirred, and he could hear her clothing rustle underneath the table as she re-crossed her legs. He could see her out of the corner of his eye, pouring over that book as if it were life and breath to her. He wondered why she never seemed to have any trouble concentrating.

He caught himself staring at her just as she looked up.

"Ready for a break?" she asked.

"Yeah, let's go have some coffee."

The air outside was wintry. They walked close together, their hands crammed in their pockets and their shoulders hunched about their ears against the cold, without speaking. By the time they made the short walk to the student union their faces were red and raw from the wind.

He helped her take off her coat and bought coffee at the machine, and they sat down in a booth in the crowded snack bar. The room was a roar of voices and clanging utensils.

"How's it coming?" he shouted at her.

'I've finished the political science, and I'm almost through with Tennyson. I should be able to start *Bleak House* tonight."

"Good," he said, without thinking it.

"How about you?"

"I'm still bogged down in World Politics. *Arms and Influence* doesn't read very fast."

"Yeah, I know." She was being sympathetic, but she wasn't helping.

Phil could think of nothing more to say, and began playing with his wooden coffee stirrer. It was always like this lately.

He turned at the sound of a voice at his side, grateful for the interruption by a friend they both knew.

"Hi, Rich," they greeted him as he slid into the booth next to Kay.

"Hello, hello," he replied, reaching for four packets of sugar and emptying them into his coffee. "How is everyone? Did you get your GRE scores today, Kay?"

Did everyone have to ask her that?

"Yeah, they came."

"How'd you do?"

"Pretty well."

"Oh yeah? And what's 'pretty well' this time, 1590?"

"No," she laughed, "only 1460."

"Only 1460," Rich groaned. "Phil, you ought to beat her for remarks like that. Wash her mouth out with soap. Do you think scores like that will get you in a suitable grad school?"

"I hope so," she said, almost shyly.

"By the way, Phil," he said, looking up across the table. "Have you heard from Baylor yet?"

"Not yet."

"Well, if you don't make it there, you can always come back here to med school. You've already been accepted here, haven't you?"

"No, not yet."

"No problem, though, I'm sure."

"We'll see. Are you ready to go back, Kay?"

"Aren't you going to finish your coffee?"

"It's cold."

When they walked outside it had begun to sleet. They ran for the library. Inside, Kay settled back into her seat and bent over her Tennyson, while Phil listened to the sounds of papers rustling, and books snapping shut.

CHARLEY CARLOCK

A WHITE RETRIEVER MEETS A COCKY MASTER

Clap—
Clap, clap . . .
They roll in—
Roll in
returning mounds of jelly
retrieved from afar.

Clap, clap—
Clap—
clap, clap
laugh the boisterous waves
in their muffled
white sound.

Strutting with perfect rhythm—
kicking the salted slippery
upon my burning legs—
sliding out—
one—
and then the other—
timing my refrain.

Ever tried to be cagey?
Sneak up on a wave—
jump up—
Flying over it—
knowing you're its master—
that is—
until the next one
slaps you on your back—
(in a congratulatory manner)
knocking your head
between your legs;
fumbled out of the ring.

Clap—
clap, clap . . .
They roll in—
Roll in
returning mounds of jelly
retrieved from afar.

JULIE FERRILL

Little black forms sneak in multitudes crammed in together
All in havocing directions
All in jerking moves of rigor mortis
Not seeing the other but missing the other by peculiar instinct.
They are not the dying. They are not the dead.
They are the dying walking dead that
say they are tired of the strife
weary of themselves
exhausted by it all.
They say all they want is to join hands and
dance around the mulberry bush until
they fall into the burning bush, together all together,
Singing "Ashes, ashes, we all fall down."
They want to burn with each other in that fire
sleep in their soft ashes
give in to the earth
be whole in the day.

Instead they sneak in black multitudes
scurrying with rat's paws across something that seems like nothing.
Each one attached to some human brain by a fine silver cord.
That man has wrapped what he thinks is himself
his soul up from his toes like a venetian blind
folded it up and oozed it out from between his eyes
connected by a silver cord.
He gives himself in that black form no rest.
Rather plays and tricks and tortures it not knowing.

If that cord were severed the form would be loosed in timelessness
Floating free and easy from that human body.

JOEL ARSENAULT

THE HOLY ZOO

at night my rib cage
rocks me like twelve insomniac
Arks on each side
they make no progress
though they float me on the flood
of bed, though they house me in
the holy zoo. And a train winds
off in the night like
a snake with a candle in its jaw
    its nose light
and I am chained to these four corners
four winds four devildark cliffs
tearing in the rain
like hysterical women farewelling
in the rail station of the heart:
as radio towers winking
their three red eyes
their message is the same
undying subtraction that begs:
    I want the other towers to blare
    what I have said
blind as larvae stupid as pupae
underground or in their tents, as
they will not share, so
I lam around with this ego
like a lame lion hauling his mauled leg
from one hermit corner of his cage
to the other
his eyes glow and he rages
at the vertical strutting
keepers of time,
foxglove and sage
in his fodder
never mollify his head
so at night my rib cage
floats me on this flood of bed,
often angry
I am alone with everything that survives

HARRIET REICHARD

SEYMOUR

Seymour, Seymour, Seymour! He sauntered out of a black Salinger's pages. He was incredibly Now, and he was a poet, and baby, he was our man. I mean, when you are but a high school chick trying to play it cool around the kiddies and still be Momma's girl come 4:30 and class is out—I mean, doesn't a Seymour tingle your aspirations? But of course. Watch him now, there he goes. Groovin round the Loop, bushy Afro, red-kerchiefed brow, back when Cleaver was still running grass, eluding the neighborhood Man. Seymour . . . snapping the crotches of Authority, droppin tabs at the frat bash he's crashing, blowing their button-down brains. Hey, there he is now monkee-e-e on the bar, show those below-average honkies how it's done . . . I mean, baby!

Seymour was not a name, Seymour was a battle cry. When baby Jan wigs out and there she is, gin rummy behind bars, morose sessions with Doctor B, tranquilizer sniffly stupor, who visits her with flask of bourbon joy-juice? Who else? Seymour dancing starchy nurses, leap-frogging the plastic waiting room straitjackets, hairy madman for frightened weekend Mommas and Poppas.

There's more! Seymour . . . Seymour, baby, come first of the month and rent due. Sucker landlady taps the door. "Are you there, Mr. Brown?" "Minute, ma'am." And there he totters, presto-dishrag loincloth clinging the bare haunches. "I been sick, ma'am." A gasp, she gone! and thirty more days pan-handled room.

But the topper . . . I mean the time we really loved Seymour, we'd get jelly-squiggly-spined talking about it—it's raining, a cloud burst night. Seymour and friends, stripped to birthday skins, stealing the tennis nets and seining the curb torrents outside the Union for guppies. Guppies! They're hopping about—got me a biggie, man! Whoo-oo-ee-ee! Tight-collar, straight-back officials charge into the wet dark, secretarial ladies teetering on their $10.95 heels, panting behind. And Seymour, arms flung wide, skinny bottom obscenely gyrating, bawls the invitation "Here come da tra-a-in!" Can you beat that?

Ah, Seymour. Seymour, what would life have been without you?

MARY FOSTER

JAMIE

"Get out your tie and put it on, Jamie . . . We're almost there now and they'll all be glad to see you again after all these years and. . ."

Mother swung her soft fat arm over the sweaty vinyl car seat and pushed her damp hair-sprayed curl back into place.

"And I want you to be presentable for Lily Earl and Caroline and Winnie and the others. Now get your hair out of your eyes."

God. I wish like hell she'd quit turning around and would keep her hands off of my hair. Down under the high-rise knees so the head's out of sight and down under the car seat to look for the flight bag. Good old skinny finger. I can just manage . . . and up onto the old knee. The cigarettes. Here, junked under that stupid tie. That dumb tie, . . . Victorians. They probably started it. To cover up the buttons on their shirt fronts so no one would realize there was a body underneath.

"Oh Jamie, I wish you wouldn't smoke! At least not now. Not before we get there. For Heaven's sake, I don't know why you want to smoke anyway, but if you've got to, I don't seey why you can't wait until they've had a chance to see you again instead of walking in there with that nasty thing."

Yeah. They'll think I'm a real degenerate bum if I walk from the car to the house and let all the neighbors and God see me with it. But it would be OK if I waited until after dinner when Lilly Earl flutters into the kitchen to get those squat-fannied demitasse cups for the coffee, and until Uncle Maurice pulls out that goddamn stupid pretentious pipe. Then I can cross my leg suavely over the other and slip my hand into my coat pocket and get a weed before I have a nicotine fit.

"Oh Janet, GIVE the boy some PEACE!"

Good old pop. She doesn't even realize that you just broke the silence that you've been keeping for the past fifty miles. But she'll hear the match. . . Don't you turn your face around at me. You know damn well that I've got a cigarette.

"*Well.* If you're bound and determined to smoke, I certainly know that anything I can say will be useless. . ."

You'd like to think that it wasn't useless, wouldn't you, Mom?

. . . "but the very least you could do would be to show some consideration for me and roll your window down."

OK, Mom. Yes 'um, Mom. You bet your life, Mom. Watch the window go down, Mom. Around and around. All you've got to have, essentially, is a long arm, nimble fingers, and high knees. Then you can just rest your elbow like so, on the old knee, and twirl the window handle around and around, until that vacuum outside scoops in and pulls your cigarette smoke outside. In a thick grey line and then the outside tears it apart and it's gone. You can't see it anymore so it can't be bad.

"We turn here, Harry. Slow down now, Harry, we don't want to miss the turn— Oh! Now you've gone too far and we were supPOSed to turn back there. . ."

Yes, we sure were, Mom. Could we maybe go to New York, instead, Mom? OOOps, nope. Here we go. Good move, Pop. Right before that semi. Hold down the temper, Pop. And away we go. . . That fat clown, Jackie Gleason. That fat clown, Uncle Maurice. And away we go. . . And through the parking lot, back into the street and here we go—around the corner.

"Now, it's just down this street a little ways so don't GO so fast!"

You're right again, Mom. There's Uncle Maurice's manicured lawn shining in the distance like a green toupe.

"There it is, Harry. Oh. It looks like we're just about the last to get here if we can judge by the number of cars out here."

Compact and lipstick time. Atta girl. Get that shinny 'glow' off your nose before, God help you, the relatives see you. It's neck tie time. Hang straight, you limp, sorry bastard. It's coat time. Sweat time. Hug the dimply fat aunts time. I could make a song up about this and rush it with a banjo on my knee, play "Preppie", and win the ladies' hearts. But Ernest is probably there to fill that role. I hope so. I love to watch that jerk play Rhet. "Frankly, madame, I don't give a damn." That Ernest would probably say that—say it while he held a gin and tonic in his white-gloved hand. Oh come on. You're going too far. Zoom in to reality, before it descends upon your magnificent head.

"Jamie? James! Do you have your tie. . .? Oh, that

looks very nice, dear. Much better. Why, you look like quite a scholar. . ."

They why did I flunk freshman English, Mom. We'll ask Cud'n Winnie why I flunked freshman English, Mom. She ought to know that. Can't think of why she wouldn't. She knows everything else. How to take sweat stains out from the arm pits of a shirt. When the girl across the street comes in too late for her own good. When Uncle Herbert ought to invest and in what. She'll know.

"Are you coming, son? Stop daydreaming and come on now. Hurry up, they're all waiting for us!"

Oh sure. Well, maybe they are. It won't be quite right 'til she's gotten there and been told how young and skinny she is and how Pop "looks so much older than you do, Janet. And is he all right?" Ah Ha! Here come the troops. Gang-busters in skirts. Open the doors and here comes Winnie. . .

"Janet! Harry! How are you all? Why this can't be Jamie?!"

It can too be Jamie. What do you mean, "This can't be Jamie?" As if I'm sort of some kind of "it". And if you're going to have to hug me, do you have to be wearing that nauseous lilac perfume? And by the way, Cousin Winnie, that orange make-up doesn't make you look a day younger so don't let Mom tell you that it does.

"Now come inside. Lilly Earl! Winnie! Maurice! The Hicklins are here!"

And on into the old barn, with the delightful, fake cupola resting on the top of the roof, somewhere. The gentry of Union, South Car-O-lina. Who were they trying to kid. Into the neo-Victorian living room—if there is such a thing—and fond memories of that straight-backed, curvy-legged, satin brocade sofa particularly when I see it in Panaromic Technicolor. And it's Lilly Earl to bring up the rear. Here comes the prima donna of our gala get-together. . .

"Why Janet and Harry, it is so very good to see you again. We've been lookin' for you folks all day. And Jamie. This must be Jamie, isn't it, Janet? Yes, of course it's you, Jamie. But when I saw you, I just couldn't help thinkin' to myself, 'That handsome boy just couldn't be James'. Well. Now. Are you just going to stand there and not give me my big hug?"

"Really good to see you, Aunt Lily." Smile. A tight smile and a stiff hug. What else can you do but smile at an old lady whose voice is beginning to waver? "Really nice to see the old place again."

Step in and it sure smells like they've been busy in this dark old barn. Come to me baby. Oh sweet smell of pecan pie and butterscotch brownies that have always been here. Past, present, and forever more. Amen. Oh wing your way on the wavering wind, sweet smells and drift into my willing nostrils. I'll just manage to get myself over in that corner by the old piano and meditate on the meaning of my. . .

"Now you come right over here, Jamie, and sit down by your Aunt Lily Earl, and let Cud'n Winnie get you something to eat. You'll get him something to eat, won't you Winnie?" And Lily Earl placed a wobbly jointed hand on his knee in affirmation of the probable.

His eyes traveled with Winnie as far as she went and then flashed around the room to see if he'd missed Ernest. Nope, Ernest isn't here. Must be the only one out of the whole goddam family who isn't here. All these damn people filling up the parlor and making the sweet, dark smell go away. And they keep filling up and spilling onto the porch . . . and they're probably covering up the creaky bench swing. Worthless goddam bench. Damn them, they can't cover up my swing. It's always been my swing when I was here.

Slowly, he began to hear Lily telling someone that he was sure the pride of the family and he was glad that Ernest wasn't there to hear her. There was a quality about Lily's voice that he couldn't quite understand. . . She was just sitting there, talking, and she was, damn well enjoying herself, but it didn't seem like she was very interested in the actual conversation. Well maybe she wasn't, he surely didn't know. He didn't even think about it so much after that. He was getting interested in figuring out when Cud'n Winnie would emerge from the kitchen, as a matter of fact, and he sure did wish she would hurry up. After all, hadn't he been magnanimous enough to come to this family reunion?

"Here you go, James. Is this what you wanted, honey?"

"Yeah. Great! This is great Cousin Winnie." Where'd you come from, Cud'n Winnie. Christ. She probably slithered in through a trap door that they used to put into houses—just in case the slaves got a little unrully. Yes sir. You can never tell when you might have to disappear in dark of night, light of moon—away and beyond the stealthy strides of the Union scouts. 1971. This is 1971, friend. And they don't really look like you thought they would. What it is, have you been away too long? Your innocense has been corrupted. And Henry James was always one of your favorites. Let him do the philosophizing.

"Well, how've you been, Lily Earl?" He took a chance.

"Oh, I haven't been so well, but that's what you've got to expect when you get to be my age. Well, now it's m'kidneys, but they'll be back in runnin' order real soon. But now, you don't want to hear about an old lady and all of her old lady ailments. . ."

You hit it on the nose, old girl. But isn't that what these things are for? That's what I told Alice. Sweet little New York Jew. She ain't never been in the South in her whole goddam life. This would blow her mind. . . It's really happening, Alice. I'm getting those old failing health stories, Alice. . .

"But besides the fact that you don't want to hear about all my ailments, I've got something to show you. Now come on into the back bedroom and I'll show you my little gallery."

He hadn't expected her to stop talking that soon and so he let her finish and begin to get up before he ever moved. He felt her enjoying his awkwardness, so he hoisted himself to his feet and almost rushed past her.

"Now come on in here and see this. This isn't any thing special but I want you to come here and see my art gallery. I've taken up painting for a hobby. And don't you laugh at me for bein' a silly old woman who thinks she can paint, cause I don't have any such ideas. . . It's just that your mama said that you've a girl friend who's interested in painting, and so I figured that you might be interested."

The door squeaked and the floor boards made hard sounds under the pressure of hard feet. The old back bedroom looked a lot bigger with the heavy mahogany furniture gone, and little bits of goop and splatters of paint were sprinkled across the center of the floor. Canvases, some framed and some not, lined the bottom the empty walls.

"So Anne's bedroom has been turned into an art gallery?" He looked around at a brand-new slick-boarded easel as he spoke. Tubes of oil paints had been gathered into the middle of the seat of a fold-up chair and the tingling smell of Green Pine turpentine floated up from a smeared hand rag. He swung around to see all, and his gaze rested on his aunt. Her gray hair was pulled haphazardly into a bun at the back of her head and wisps of gray spilled out unconcernedly, and were silhouetted against the familiar cafe curtains in back of her. They're not so white or so crisp, anymore. Nothing is so white or so crisp anymore.

"Now here's one I'm right proud of. It's a picture of Eleanor's child, Lisa. Oh, now I know it's nothing fancy, but I think it's right good for an old woman like me."

He was startled to find the intent stare of her blue eyes fixed on his face. He hadn't been aware that they were so blue and he looked away and then focused on the rigid, orangy fleshed child on the canvas.

God. Am I ever glad Alice isn't here. She'd make hock out of that portrait. And what a portrait. Poor kid looks like it's dying of consumptive mumps. "Lily Earl, you just may be another Rembrandt."

"Jamie! Shame on you for telling an old woman like me a lie like that! You don't have to pull my leg son, we're not in the living room with the others now."

"Aunt Lily, I . . . I really thought that, under the circumstances, your painting had real. . ."

"Potential. . ."

"Yeah. . ."

"Fiddlesticks! Now you and I both know that isn't so. Besides, did you think the only reason I brought you in here was to show you all my doodles? Why no. I thought it was time that you and me had a break from the living room. Now don't misunderstand me, I do love to get together with all my sisters and kin, but I just thought we were both getting a little ear-weary. And I see these people all the time and I know what they're doing all the time, It's good to have some new blood in here to liven things up. . . Or at least, to have some old blood that's been circulating other places. . ."

You are too a Rembrandt. You are too. But sweet light on the rose bushes and you know you always loved being here the best. In the summer with Anne and Ruddy. And that tree was so green then and it just seemed to lean down and grab us up into its branches. Oh you fine man. It was OK to be here when we were in those branches but you can't be in those branches now.

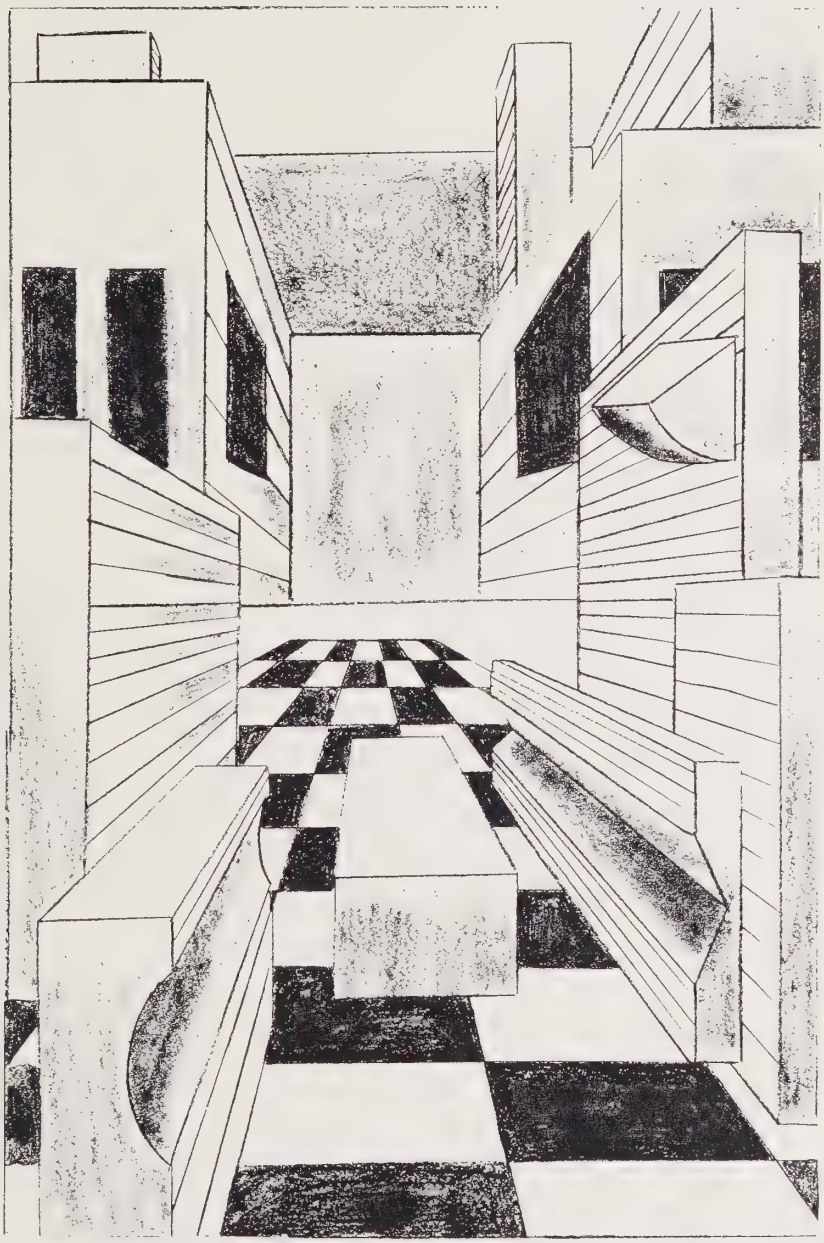
". . . and I know that you'd like seeing Anne and Ruddy now. I wish they could be here. But you'd hardly recognize them now. Oh, but I'm sure that they'd like to know how school's agreeing with you and all, just the same."

"Yes 'um. I'm sure sorry that they aren't here now." So I think I'll go outside and go right over there under the old maple and just see. "Yes, I sure am sorry it's been so long since we've gotten together, so, if you don't mind, I think I'd like to go out back and take a look at the old place again."

EDIE SHOWALTER

LINGUISTICS

I was born speaking Greek
With innumerable delights on which to comment—
Especially that strange multicolored abacus above my crib,
And my mother's breasts, but somehow my gurgles wouldn't do.
Now I've mastered the English tongue,
But draining a glass at Leopold's he could have been spouting
French or German, French most likely, even though he was
Just an All-American asshole,
And I might as well have utilized my past proficiency
In gurgles.



GORDON GROVES

WHEATFIELD WITH CROWS

Okay
so what are you doing here
in the eternal nonsense of chalk elephant winters
under white marble statues of blind births and straight lines.
Hearing only the sound of snow falling on
snow, and over the wings of crows,
like swans across the universe; or more—
semicolons in Chinese temples where the stars
issue their promises posthumously.
Since hiding is the slow way up and
there is no leader waiting in shadows beneath the bridge
then shall we all gather
at the edge of the Birdbath and be sanctified with
reflections of the sky, where confrontation
is a clown in polkadots, his tears running makeup
over his mouth
and into the sea.

JULIE FERRILL

All that nasty handling.
All that pushing and pulling and twisting
All that sighing and moaning and groaning
All that grinding is so ungrateful.

VICKI SELLERS

THE CHURCH

There were bricks, stones, all kinds of paraphernalia
Strewn about the wreckage of a building—
A building that was once a church!
Perhaps, the very first church ever built in the little town.
Now, on one of its white doors (One door was still standing.) was
printed in bold letters of defiance:
NO TRESPASSING
No trespassing in what once had been a haven of rest?
In the other empty doorways, the damp, cold wind entered,
And in fits of anger blew the remnants of an old hymnal about
the desolate sanctuary.
The beautiful stained glass windows, which so many generations had
looked upon and seen the glory of God, were gone—
Sold to an old man who collected cheap glass.
The brilliant arches, works of art, had disappeared,
And their steel frameworks lay cast aside on the ground.
Even the steeple which had once towered in communion
with God was torn down,
As if it were part of a store, an office, a slum.
A church which had taken years to build
In a few days vanished.
However, the memory of the little church on the corner
departed not from the minds of its members—
For buildings are erected and destroyed,
But the joy of remembering cannot be given nor taken away.
Those who had become joined in holy matrimony there,
Those who had been baptized in that chapel,
But mostly those first twelve who had built the church,
Who had seen many a dream come true,
Could remember the church on the corner and the joys
they shared beneath its roof.
Nevertheless, they would never be able to forget
how it looked on the dreary day in May
When the last wall fell.

SARAH McNAMEE

THE CEDAR CHEST

Bill was in his usual spot behind the counter when I walked in the drug store. He half-leaned against the ice cream freezer, his head cocked to one side listening to the news on a small radio which sat on a shelf behind the counter. A cigarette dangled, as always, from the side of his mouth. When he talked, the cigarette jiggled rhythmically up and down and the long gray ash fell all over his shirt front at some time during the conversation. The cigarette sort of clung to his lower lip and when he had smoked it down to the end, he would pull it away from his mouth, invariably leaving a small piece of white paper stuck to his lip. I never saw him smile. His face somehow always looked as though he had just heard a secret. He was constantly enveloped in clouds of smoke and the big rectangular mirror behind him was veiled in blue, making everything reflected in it look blurred and hazy.

I stood uncertainly before him. He looked at me as though I were interrupting his program and he did not like the intrusion. I told Mama I did not like to go in there because he always acted like I was bothering him and she said, "Never mind, child. We pay Bill Holt cash for what we buy and Bill Holt loves cash! That man squeezes a nickel 'til the buffalo hollers! You don't need to worry about "botherin" him when you're payin' cash, honey."

"Whatcha want?" His voice was gruff and startled me.

"Mentholatum please—the twenty-five cent jar", I answered.

He walked the length of the counter to the back of the drug store. A group of men were clustered around the pinball machine, laughing and talking. To keep from looking at them, I directed my eyes toward the glass display case at the end of the counter. The shelves inside the case were dusty and littered with all sorts of odds and ends. Scattered here and there were some Mickey Mouse watches, assorted charm bracelets all tangled up in a ball and several bottles of Caroid and Bile Salts. My gaze finally wandered up to the top of the cabinet and there I saw what I had been wanting forever—or at least it seemed that way to me at the time. It was the most beautiful little cedar chest that I had ever seen. The wood had been polished to a high shine so that it fairly sparkled in its dusty setting and the straps of "gold" metal across the top stood out like glowing banners against the burnished wood. A tiny padlock, with key inserted, hung open in the loop. I stood transfixed, hypnotized with desire. I had never wanted anything in all my thirteen years as much as I wanted this cedar chest. This would be my very special hiding place for my very special secret treasures. I could keep my gold cross and my diary and my letter from Buddy Corpening and my imitation diamond ring in there. June and Peg could not bother my stuff any more because I would hide the key. I would ask Daddy if the cedar chest could be my Christmas present (we were each allowed one gift)—and Christmas was only three weeks away. If I could not have the cedar chest I did not want anything at all.

"Anything else?" It was Bill again.

"How much is that?" I asked, pointing to the chest.

"How much is what?"

"That," I repeated, "that little cedar chest."

"Oh, that—well now, that there ain't for sale, honey. Ye have to win that on the punchboard."

"The punchboard?" I queried, puzzled.

"Yep, the punchboard. Tell your Daddy to come in and buy you a punch fer a dime. Yo got jist as good a chance as anybody. And lookie here—here's your name—ain't nobody bought the name "Sarah" yet.

Obviously, no one had bought any punches because all of the names were still there. I looked at the chest again. My eyes burned—I wanted it so badly.

Noting my fascination he pushed the issue further.

"Lookie here, honey," he said, "bet ye didn't know there was a box of chocolates inside here, did ye?" He opened the lid to expose a little mirror set in red velvet with a box of Schraffts' candy snugly nestled down in the red velvet lining. "You could give this candy to yer Momma fer Christmas and keep the chest fer yerself," he continued. "Better tell yer Daddy to come on in and buy some punches 'fore they're all gone."

I thanked him and picked up the bag containing the mentholatum and hurried out the door. It was cold outside, so I ran all the way home to keep warm. I went through the back door to the kitchen. I loved our kitchen; it was big and warm and happy and Mama was

always there. She was rolling out biscuit dough. I loved to watch her cut out the biscuits so I stood beside the doughboard and waited. She dipped the cutter into the little pile of flour on the side of the doughboard and then pressed it down firmly into the dough, twisting it sharply as she pressed. She repeated this movement time after time until the dough became a design of small, perfect circles, then she placed them in neat rows in a long, low pan.

"Where's Daddy?" I asked.

"In the barn, I think. Why?"

"I want to ask him something."

Just then the door swung open and Daddy came in—his arms full of wood for the kitchen stove. Dropping it in the wood-box beside the range, he walked over to the sink and rinsed off his hands.

He was a small man with gray hair. I thought he was very handsome. Mama was much larger than Daddy. She towered over him—and yet Daddy was the head of the house. His decision was final—and no matter what the issue in question, Mama would say "What do *you think, Percy?*" So I always went to Daddy first.

I walked over to the sink. "Daddy," I said, "How do you win something on a punchboard?"

"Well," he answered, "everyone buys a name and punches it out and when all the punches are sold, the owner of the punchboard looks under the disc in the center of the board and, if your name is under the disc, then you are the winner."

"Oh," I said, flatly.

Daddy must have noticed my disappointment from the tone of my voice because he put his arm about my shoulder in a protective manner and said solemnly, "What's wrong, Kitten?" "What is it you want to win?"

I began to describe the cedar chest, and as I talked, I could feel the excitement mounting inside of me and my words stumbled over each other in my eagerness to portray, in detail, the beauty of this thing that I wanted so desparately.

Mama's eyes met Daddy's and held. I could tell by the way they sat very still and listened that they understood how very important this was to me but, in their faces, I could see the hopelessness and, behind their glances, I could sense the futility of it all. We never had any money except for absolute necessities.

Daddy spoke first. "Kitten," he said softly, "We will go tonight and punch out your name. But, Sweetheart, I want you to understand that this is no guarantee that you will win the chest."

Mama said "Percy, why don't you punch out the names of all three girls—"Sarah", "Peggy" and "June"? This way she will have three chances to win—and it will only cost thirty cents."

He nodded in agreement.

"Can we go right after supper, Daddy?"

"Yes, 'Kitten', right after supper."

Daddy was a doctor but nobody ever paid him in cash. He had a lot of patients but nobody had any money so they paid him for his services with apples, and cabbage, and chickens and potatoes and stuff like that. Mama had suggested sending bills to patients in a possible attempt to collect some money instead of produce but Daddy always came back with the same classic remark.

"You can't get blood out of a turnip, Helen," he would say, "They are all as poor as we are—they would give me money if they had it."

Then Mama would say, as she had said a thousand times before "We will not worry; the Lord *will* provide."

After supper Daddy and I went to the drug store.

Bill's eyes got that hungry look when we walked in. He knew why we had come because all he said was "Howdy Doc" and walked straight to the case and picked up the punchboard and sat it up in front of Daddy on the counter.

Daddy looked carefully at the board. "Hm-m-m, he mused. "Well, here are all three names — "Sarah", "Peggy", and "June". He gave me the punch key which resembled the key that comes on cans of corned beef. I punched out the three names and Bill recorded them on a lined sheet of paper. Opposite each name he wrote "Doc Thomson".

I thanked Daddy and put the little crinkled pieces of paper with the names on them in my coat pocket and we went back home. That night I put the "names" under my pillow and prayed. Mama had always said "Never underestimate the power of prayer" and she had also quoted from the Scriptures, verses like "Seek and ye shall find" and "Ask and it shall be given"—and I was banking on the legitimacy of these quotations more than I ever had before in my whole life.

Every day, after school, I went by the drug store and looked at the chest. Then I would ask Bill to let me see the board. He would thrust the board at me sort of grudgingly—and take quick, short draws on his cigarette as though my presence agitated him. His face looked more secretive than ever. Every day he said the same thing to me.

"They're goin' like hotcakes now, honey. Shore hope you win!"

The winner was to be announced on Christmas Eve I thought the night would never come. We went to town two hours before the winner was to be announced. Mama said we could see the decorations if we went early. We looked in all the store windows and at the big beautiful Christmas tree in the square. Santa Claus was sitting near the tree on a stack of apple crates while

had been covered with cotton padding. In spots, though, the cotton had shifted, exposing the slates so that everybody knew they were apple crates. Beulah Beck's little boys were going up one by one to tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas. Jimmy Beck came over to my youngest brother, Richard, and told him that when he sat on Santa's lap, Santa's breath smelled like whiskey and he didn't much think it was really Santa Claus. Finally, after what seemed to me to be an eternity, Daddy decided that it was time to go on to the drug store. It started snowing—and I was glad. I had been wishing for a white Christmas but I didn't pray for one because I did not want to overtax God with too many requests. My teeth were chattering and I felt cold all over.

The drug store was full of people but no one seemed to be buying anything. There was the usual crowd around the pin-ball machine. Bill was listening to the radio but he reached over and clicked it off when we walked in. His eyes seemed to be smiling as though he knew something special. I had never seen him in such a mellow mood.

The Cedar Chest was on the counter in full view. The punchboard with every name punched out was propped up beside it. Bill cleared his throat and the long ash fell from his cigarette all over the counter top. He rubbed his hands together briskly and picked up the punchboard.

"Lemme see now", he said "Who will we get to pull off the tab?"

I could not speak. My mouth was dry and my stomach hurt.

"What about you—young feller?" Bill motioned to Richard. "You wanta pull th' tab?"

Richard nodded and Bill handed him the board. He pulled the tab and gasped. Mama was looking over his shoulder. She screamed, "It's Sarah! It's Sarah!

Bill smiled, exposing a gold tooth which I had never seen before. He picked up the cedar chest and placed it tenderly in my arms. Tears burned my eyelids. I had never been so happy in all my life. Under my breath I said, "Thank you, God."

The ground was white when we went outside. I still could not talk, but my stomach had stopped hurting. All this and a White Christmas too!

It wasn't until a long time after Christmas that I found out the truth. I had to go to Bill's for a package of razor blades for Daddy when I heard one of the men at the pinball machine talking to one of the others. "Yep," he said, "the Doc made a deal with Bill. He bought three of them names every day so the kid wouldn't know. He bought every punch on the whole dang board so the kid would be sure to get the chest."

LINDA HUDSON

NEW JOB IN SYRACUSE

Due to an eight hour engagement
With a lavatory-green cubicle,
I regret I shall be unable
To attend your performance,
Snow.

These upstate stoics
Take you too much
For granted
And I
Although yet foreign
Must accept their way
Or be icicled
To oblivion.

MARY CROW

I don't want spring to come
Not yet
My mind is too much filled with
ice and snow
and cold rain
I am not yet ready to sink roots,
to reach out.
The plastic insulation
is still wrapped around
my branches
invisibly protective
holding in *my* air,
my warmth,
my life.
Just enough to pass the winter.
But how long?
I am tired of living on Vita-grow
and promises of spring.
I fail to see connections
between the fakery of hot houses
and clambering wisteria.
I suppose I want to bloom,
someday.
But I must have the sun
And real earth.
I hope it won't be long before
someone discovers the plastic
For I've grown almost too weak
with waiting
To be ready for spring.

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